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**Davidson, Robert A. (2001) Anumadutchi & The Queensland Orchestra: united by Brophy. In *RealTime, Open City*.**

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## **Anumadutchi & The Queensland Orchestra: united by Brophy Robert Davidson**

The primary feeling I have from this festival is "yes, the twenty-first century has arrived." There is something very much of the moment about the collection of performances, and it's an exciting time to be listening.

There's a real sense of hope in music right now- a feeling of shackles falling off and of large vistas opening up which we didn't see before. Old institutions are starting to (having to) reinvent themselves with the future in mind, and cross-fertilisations are bearing mature fruit (like to **Into the Fire**).

Gerard Brophy showed tonight a highly attractive and viable future direction for the symphony orchestra. The hall was full, largely with the age group coveted by arts institutions- the under 25s. The audience jumped to a standing ovation, and cheered heartily. The concert was an unmitigated joy. Gone was the dutiful sense of almost religious observance attending much symphony music; it was replaced with a feeling of camaraderie and exalted pleasure as three cultures- the music of Senegal, Mozambique and Europe- combined to create something new.

Brophy has come up with music that feels utterly contemporary—no ironic smirk, no superior scowl, simply a revelling in the amazing power which can be found in melody, harmony, rhythm, sound. For me, it's the best work of one of our best composers. I first heard it last year at his house (he was beaming, clearly pleased with what he'd managed to create) through the little earphones of a Walkman and it greatly impressed me. To hear it live was a revelation, especially as the Queensland Orchestra was in wonderful form, enthusiastic and unified, under the energetic direction of Robert Casteels.

I haven't been so taken with, or so enjoyed, a new orchestral work for years. **yo yai pakebi, man mai yapbi** (Wolof, the language of Senegal, for "I am the knife, you are the meat"—a typical Brophy double entendre title) is a concerto for Anumadutchi and orchestra. The Dutch ensemble specialises in the percussion traditions of Senegal and Mozambique. Music from these traditions formed the first half of the concert, exuberantly led by master musicians Aly N'Diaye Rose and Venancio Mbande. There was also a very Steve Reich-influenced work, "Raka Diou", by Anumadutchi's leader Wim Vos, which was interesting to hear just days after Reich's *Drumming* (played by Synergy on Monday). Reich's work is far more systematic and "cleaner", deliberately avoiding the passion and energy lent by the more traditional elements in Vos' work. The New York composer has always avoided what he sees as exoticism in cross-

cultural music making, and has disapproved of using non-Western instruments in a Western context; I wonder if tonight's concert would cause him to rethink.

The orchestra's entrance for Brophy's piece was enhanced by the extended inclusion of African music- the velvety strings and highly coloured woodwinds sounded all the more glorious as a contrast to the drums and timbilas (marimba-like instruments). I experienced a greater appreciation of the achievements of the West, having just heard some of the treasures Africa has to offer.

Starting softly with a motoric, constantly changing viola solo, expertly sustained by Jann Keir-Haantera, Brophy's work grows and builds gradually. Lush big-band-era diatonic clusters in the winds soon appear, and bigger, bolder strokes set the stage for the percussionists, who enter playing, one by one from backstage, building a polyphonic tapestry of rhythm. After reaching a rhythmic climax, a slow spacious passage begins, showing off the percussionists' formidable skills with Western percussion. This slow movement is clearly influenced by Ambient music and other techno-related music, which seems to be a general underlying influence, but always below the surface. A slow build begins, leading to the drums played at full volume with almost inhuman accuracy and vitality. The string players, who would not be heard over this powerful sound, put down their instruments and clap interlocking patterns. Eventually the brass join in and take us right over the top, finishing the piece in a spectacular frenzied climax.

Brophy deserves to become very famous with this piece. It seems to express just what we need at the moment- a blast of pure, uninhibited joy.